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Issue Expansion and Selective Scrutiny

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How Opposition Parties Used Parliamentary Questions about the European Union in the National Arena from 1973 to 2013

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Abstract

The scrutiny exerted by opposition parties in European Union (EU) affairs crucially contributes to the functioning of democratic accountability in the EU. While our knowledge about the extent of control activities has increased, we know little about their content. This article investigates the policy issues that opposition parties address in parliamentary questions about the EU. I argue that Eurosceptic opposition parties follow vote-maximizing strategies and selectively scrutinize very general aspects of the EU. My expectation is tested using a unique data collection of written questions in the Danish *Folketing* (1973-2013). I find evidence that the content of questions has been broadened over time and that Eurosceptic parties strongly emphasize general EU matters. The results point to the importance of political parties in making democratic accountability in the EU work.

Keywords: EU Affairs, Issue Emphasis, Parliamentary Questions, Parliamentary Scrutiny

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Introduction

European integration has brought radical changes to domestic legislatures. Most strikingly is their loss of power towards EU institutions because of transfers of legislative authority from national parliaments to the European Commission, the European Council, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament (Brouard et al., 2012; Hix and Høyland, 2013; Katz and Wessels, 1999). These shifts in authority have important implications for the way delegation and accountability are working in the domestic legislative arena (Bergman, 2000). Among other things, legislatures are remote from EU decision-making. For a long time, national parliaments have suffered from ‘information asymmetries’ vis-a-vis members of the executive who vote and negotiate in the Council and European Council (Auel and Benz, 2007). While national parliaments’ overall access to EU documents has improved over time, there are still large differences between government and opposition parties’ access to information about EU politics. Government parties regularly receive relevant and timely information at informal party meetings. Opposition parties, however, tend to struggle to find information about what the national executive is doing and deciding at the European level (Holzhacker, 2002; Proksch and Slapin, 2011). This influences the democratic quality of the EU, but also party responsiveness to European multi-level governance. It seems that in order to make democratic accountability work, opposition parties would need to actively address EU policy-making in their parliamentary oversight operations.

However, not all opposition parties have incentives to acknowledge the transfer of legislative authority to the EU. While the overall politicization of European integration in domestic politics has increased in recent decades, parties pursue very different strategies regarding attitudes towards the EU, issue emphasis and issue framing (Hoeglinger, 2016; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). I suggest that these differences will also be reflected in the scrutiny parties exert in EU affairs. By

linking insights from EU politicization theory with the literature on parliamentary scrutiny in EU affairs, I argue that Eurosceptic opposition parties selectively scrutinize general aspects of the EU, such as treaties, institutions and enlargement. These parties have interests that broad debates about the future of the EU are salient in public debate (Hertner, 2015). In their parliamentary scrutiny activities, they will therefore focus on policies *about the EU* (such as positions towards the purpose and future of European integration) and de-emphasize policies *through the EU* (such as votes and bargaining positions on EU legislation). To test my expectation, I analyze the content of written parliamentary questions about the EU in the Danish *Folketing* from 1973 to 2013. Denmark is a suitable case for studying a framework on partisan questioning dynamics. Most importantly, its party system is broadly representative of Europe in general, with a mix of pro-European and anti-European parties from both sides of the ideological spectrum. Before I analyze the differences between opposition parties, it is however necessary to investigate the expansion of policy issues as a whole. If parties do not ask EU-related questions about a broad range of different issues, it would be redundant to explain variation with respect to general aspects of the EU across parties. The first part of the analysis therefore provides evidence from count response regression models and policy issue diversity measurements. It shows that opposition parties ask questions about a wide range of different policy issues, especially after the ratification of the treaty of Maastricht. While this can be seen as a sign that parties wish to be involved in EU policy-making, I find evidence for differences between parties. Results from fractional logit models show that Eurosceptic competitors tend to be more likely to scrutinize general aspects of the EU. This finding suggests that party competition at the national level has important implications for the functioning of democratic accountability in EU affairs. If Eurosceptic competitors, who tend to be the most active parties in scrutinizing the government in EU affairs, mainly focus on issues that

are favorable to them, in other words, polity-related issues, accountability with regard to EU policy-making processes suffers. In sum, the results provide empirical evidence for the link between party strategic factors at the domestic level and democratic accountability in the EU.

Political parties and parliamentary scrutiny activities

Scholars with an interest in parliamentary involvement in EU affairs have typically analyzed formal rules for national parliaments – treated as unitary actors – to control EU decision-making (Norton, 1996; Maurer and Wessels, 2001). Several studies take formal agreements on legislatures' rights in EU affairs (e.g. access to information, information processing, mandating rights) as their point of departure and investigate the variation in committee organization and overall strength in EU affairs between member state parliaments (Bergman, 1997; Raunio, 2005; Karlas, 2011; Winzen, 2012). In the process, more and more scholars have stressed the relevance of political parties for the realization of active parliamentary control in EU affairs (Holzhacker, 2002; Saalfeld, 2005; Raunio, 2009; Winzen, 2013). If parties and their MPs do not make use of scrutiny instruments, the rights of parliaments to control the executive in EU affairs become ineffective. As a result, recent studies increasingly take parties' active use of EU-related parliamentary control instruments into account. They show that higher levels of conflict between parties about the EU increase the number of reasoned opinions submitted within the Early Warning Mechanism (Gattermann and Hefftl, 2015). With regard to parliamentary debates, we know that internal party cohesion in combination with public support for European integration tend to be a crucial driver of EU politicization (Auel and Raunio, 2014; Rauh, 2015). The only study that looks into

EU-related questioning activities at the domestic level – investigating the case of France – does not find evidence that party-based indicators matter and instead points to the nature of institutional procedures to explain the Europeanization of parliamentary questions (Navarro and Brouard, 2014). Quite surprisingly, the authors show that there are no differences in the number of questions tabled between government and opposition parties as well as Europhiles and Eurosceptics. Furthermore, scholars have investigated the use of parliamentary questions at the European level. Here, findings reveal that MEPs from national opposition parties and Eurosceptic parties are particularly active in asking questions in the European Parliament – also in an effort to alert the Commission to cases of non-compliance (Jensen et al., 2013; Proksch and Slapin, 2011).

In sum, a large body of research suggests that party political contestation over European integration plays an important role for the number of EU scrutiny activities. However, we clearly miss information about the policy issues that are addressed in parties' control activities about the EU. Practically all studies treat the EU as a single issue.¹ This means that scholars do not differentiate between control activities that address EU-wide rules on genetically engineered food or the latest treaty adaptation but approach them as belonging to one and the same policy area. Hence, our knowledge about parliamentary accountability in EU affairs is limited to the salience of control activities. We know how many debates, resolutions and questions have been submitted, but we lack information about the actual content of these activities. However, it is important to know about the aspects of the EU that are raised in parties' scrutiny activities. Findings show that issue emphasis strategies of political parties have implications for vote choice (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008; Green and Hobolt, 2008) and the quality of political debate more generally since parties that selectively empha-

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¹Finke and Dannwolf (2013) provide descriptive results for EU scrutiny in European affairs committees (EACs) for 15 policy areas in Germany and the Czech Republic in the period from 2006 and 2009. Other studies differentiate between crisis and non-crisis related control activities (e.g. Auel and Höing, 2014).

size issues end up ‘talking past each other’ (Budge and Farlie, 1983, 24). Hence, knowledge about the policy issues that parties address in their EU control activities will contribute to our understanding of whether and how EU scrutiny contributes to a strengthening of democratic processes in the EU.

Selective issue emphasis in EU scrutiny activities

Many different aspects of the EU can be raised in parliamentary control activities. Parties can address very general issues such as EU treaties and institutions, or they can talk about very specific issues such as agricultural subsidies, recycling and social benefits for low-income families. Recent research shows that parties do not necessarily pay attention to the same aspects when they talk about the EU. Parties tend to choose the EU issues they wish to address selectively so that they fit their general strategies and ideological outlook (Helbling et al., 2010; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Senninger and Wagner, 2015). In addition, parties tend to frame EU issues selectively as either an economic or cultural matter (Kriesi, 2007; McLaren, 2006). Similar patterns are likely to occur with respect to issue emphasis in opposition parties’ parliamentary questions about the EU. In particular, I expect mainstream and more extreme Eurosceptic opposition parties to act differently regarding the attention they devote to general (policy-related) and policy-specific EU issues. The differentiation between general and policy-specific issues takes up a recent conceptualization of European policy that distinguishes between policies *about the EU* and policies *through the EU* (Hertner, 2015). The former refers to general positions towards European integration; that is, whether a party is in favor or against the deepening and widening of the EU. This includes topics such as treaties, the main institutions of the EU and enlargement. The latter refers to specific pieces of legislation that are decided in the Council of the EU and the European Parliament; that is, party positions towards legislative proposals.

Mainstream parties are constrained by past and future government participation (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010). This implies that they are expected to explain and react to important decisions at the European level and thus regularly talk about EU policy-making – Hertner’s policies *through the EU*. In addition, most mainstream parties have benefited from the dynamics of European integration in terms of access to power and funding (Topaloff, 2012). As a result, mainstream parties control the central bodies of the EU and decide at the European level. I therefore expect that the goal of future government participation will give mainstream opposition parties incentives to deal with the details of EU policy-making. Even if they are not able to wield influence because of their current status in opposition, they are not able to afford to neglect policy-making at the EU level. They need to be up to date about current policies, are expected to have an opinion about them and might even present policy alternatives. Hence, mainstream opposition parties will ask questions about all sorts of policy issues *through the EU*. In addition, mainstream parties are not keen on discussing general questions about the EU. Most mainstream parties are much more in favor of European integration than the median voter, which leads them to keep silent about general topics such as the future of the EU, enlargement or treaties (Steenbergen and Scott, 2004). They will therefore limit the number of questions *about the EU*.

In contrast, extreme Eurosceptic parties lack access to the EU’s center of power, which gives them leeway for being more critical towards the EU. I expect that they will broadly avoid becoming involved in technical and complicated discussions about policies *through the EU*, especially since they are not held accountable for EU policy output and not expected to react to it. They will therefore ask fewer questions about specific policy issues but talk more about general aspects of European integration. In addition to the fact that extreme Eurosceptic parties are neither responsible nor accountable for EU policy outputs, they also have strategic incentives to fo-

cus on general debates about the EU. This is especially the case in Eurosceptic societies in which the median voter increasingly opposes European integration (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2007; De Vries, 2007). Parties with critical attitudes towards the EU thus have a greater potential to mobilize the Eurosceptic electorate by making general discussions about the EU salient on the political agenda. These general debates about European integration are also more likely to be covered by news media (Hertner, 2015).

Apart from their mobilization potential, general EU aspects are also suited to attack mainstream competitors. European integration is considered a wedge issue, which means that it cannot easily be subsumed in the left-right dimension and is likely to divide mainstream coalition governments and mainstream parties (Tzelgov, 2014; Van de Wardt et al., 2014). Extreme parties face no constraints of present or future government participation and are therefore likely to exploit the potential of general discussions *about the EU* to confront their mainstream competitors with questions about EU aspects that they would rather like to avoid talking about. Parliamentary questions in particular seem to be suitable for the emphasis of issues that divide mainstream competitors as the instrument allows for the government to be addressed in a very direct way. In sum, general debates about the EU help extreme competitors to advertise their Eurosceptic outlook and offer them the opportunity to harm their mainstream competitors. My expectation concerning parties' EU issue emphasis is thus as follows:

Eurosceptic opposition parties selectively emphasize general EU aspects in their parliamentary questions about the EU (selective issues emphasis).

To test this conjecture, I need to have an idea about policy issue variation in EU-related parliamentary questions. If all parties would

address the same aspects of the EU, the investigation of the reasons that explain variation across political parties with respect to general matters would be redundant. Hence, I expect that the policy issues addressed in parliamentary questions have been expanded over time.

It is evident that the EU has evolved tremendously. The number of member states has grown, new institutions have arisen and policy issues covered by EU decision-making have expanded from trade to almost all policy areas (Bartolini, 2005; Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Hence, the deepening of the political, economic and cultural integration of the EU links ever more policy issues – which have traditionally been decided at the domestic level – to decision-making at the European level. The literature pictures the task expansion of the EU quite comprehensively (e.g. Börzel, 2005; Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970; Pollack, 1994). Several studies investigate the enhancement of EU authority to new policy areas and compare the importance of EU decision-making with the domestic level.² Research findings provide evidence that legislative authority has increasingly been transferred from the domestic to the European level (König et al., 2012). This implies that national legislatures deal with ever more pieces of legislation from a broadened set of policy areas that have their origin at the European level. In addition, there is ample evidence that political parties increasingly deal with European issues and apply European frames, for example, during European election campaigns (Wüst, 2009). This increased engagement has repercussions for public debate about Europe and attitudes towards the EU at the domestic level (Van der Brug and De Vreese, 2016). With respect to my research interest, I expect that opposition parties are responsive to the increase in the number of policies that originate from the European level and thus formulate the following condition for selective issue emphasis in par-

²These two aspects are often depicted as the scope and level of European integration. However, the meaning of scope and level is not unambiguous. While scope originally refers to task expansion, its more recent meaning captures the legislative procedures applied and the supranational bodies involved in the decision-making process (see Börzel, 2005).

liamentary questions about the EU:

The range of policy issues in parties' parliamentary questions about the EU has increased over time (issue expansion).

EU scrutiny in Denmark

As this study investigates the case of Denmark, some features of the Danish political system have to be taken into account. I therefore discuss the Danish EU scrutiny system and underline the relevance of investigating parliamentary questions in the light of the dominant role of the European Affairs Committee (EAC). In addition, I provide information about Danish minority parliamentarism, parliamentary questions and the Danish party landscape.

Parliamentary questions: As already mentioned, scholars in the early days of EU scrutiny research were focusing on the institutional adaption of national parliaments in the form of European affairs committees. This is also true for the Danish case, in which the EAC is considered as particularly powerful and acts at the heart of the EU coordination system (Maurer and Wessels, 2001; O'Brennan and Raunio, 2007). Apart from comprehensive access to information about the EU policy-making process, the Danish EAC stands out with regard to its mandating system (Jensen, 2003; Laursen, 2005). Committee members regularly meet with ministers to discuss the legislative agenda of the following meeting of the Council of the EU and (orally) decide on the government's proposed negotiation position. If a majority of committee members votes against the government, a new proposal has to be introduced. Hence, the Danish mandating system ensures that the government does not agree to EU proposals that have no majority support in the Danish *Folketing* (for a more detailed discussion see Jensen, 2003). While the strong involvement of the Danish parliament in the form of

its EAC is generally seen as a good thing, more recent research has identified several problems caused by the central role of the EAC that might hinder EU scrutiny (Sousa, 2008; Christensen, 2015).

For example, the EAC targets issues discussed and decided in the upcoming meeting of the Council of the EU and other EU institutions (e.g. European Parliament or the European Court of Justice)³. This implies that committee members are limited by the EU's legislative agenda and are not able to raise issues that they wish to discuss. Another point of criticism is the conduct of the mandating system, which follows a consensual logic and makes it very difficult for political parties but also individual MPs to impact on the government's opinion. The procedure mirrors the functioning of Danish parliamentarism, according to which minority governments, which are the rule rather than the exception, secure broad cooperation either through bloc majorities along ideological lines or in the case of EU decision-making with the support of pro-EU parties (Green-Pedersen and Thomsen, 2005). One problem with the mandating system is that it is seen as a restriction of parliamentary involvement, especially, since only a very small group of 17 MPs (out of 179) is regularly involved in EU affairs committee meetings. Recent efforts to get sectoral committees more involved in EU coordination have not shown the desired effects yet (Christensen, 2015). In sum, the consensual style and tight agenda of committee meetings prevent parties from adding issues to the agenda and raising conflicting positions in committee meetings. Party representatives in the EAC who would wish to address other issues than those on the Council's agenda feel that there is no time to do so (Sousa, 2008).

Hence, while EU scrutiny in EACs is certainly a very important part of democratic accountability in the EU, it does not allow for an analysis of the EU-related issues that parties wish to address. I suggest that written parliamentary questions are better suited to indi-

³Blom-Hansen and Olsen (2015) trace how the Danish EAC has adapted to the institutional development at the European level.

cate the content of parties' control activities. Questions have no limitations regarding the issues parties wish to address and the point in time they wish to raise them. Moreover, there are no differences between questions that are related to the EU and questions that address domestic issues (Christensen, 2015; Folketinget, 2011). Parliamentary questions therefore provide an insight into the degree to which political parties in parliament are willing to integrate the EU in their day-to-day scrutiny work and complement research findings based on EU control activities in parliamentary committees.

In sum, the Danish *Folketing* has three questioning procedures: Interpellations, questions to ministers and questions to ministers from committees. Written questions are part of questions to ministers and are generally known as §20 questions, as §20 of the standing orders is determining the rules and requirements (Folketinget, 2011). Most importantly, any individual MP is entitled to ask a question, and there are (almost) no restrictions regarding the number of questions.⁴ A written question has to be briefly and concisely worded. The questioner is allowed to include a brief explanatory statement and may ask for a written or oral answer. Before 2007, there were no strict rules regarding the content of a written question. MPs were entitled to ask for information on any public matter of interest given that the information necessary to answer the question was immediately accessible to the minister and her staff. In 2007, a reform resulted in a large decrease in the number of questions tabled. Since then, questions have to concern ministers' opinions, whereas questions concerning factual information have to be addressed through committees. Whether a question complies with the rules or not is decided by the chair-

person of parliament.

Party landscape: The time period under study begins with the accession of Denmark to the European Community in 1973, after a majority of Danish citizens had voted 'yes' in a referendum the year before. A general election in the year the Scandinavian country joined the EU, fundamentally changed the Danish party system, doubling the number of parties represented in parliament from five to ten (Green-Pedersen, 2014). Most strikingly, the radical right-wing Progress Party secured 16 per cent of the vote share. Before the election, four parties had dominated Danish politics: the Conservative People's Party, the Liberals, the Social Democrats and the Social Liberal Party. The increase of parties represented in parliament destabilized Danish politics, with frequently changing minority governments (Elklit and Pedersen, 2003). The second electoral consequence with crucial implications for the Danish party system was the success of the right-wing Danish People's Party, a split-off of the Progress Party, from the mid-1990's onwards. The party stands out on its Eurosceptic and anti-immigration position and has been very successful in the two most recent elections in Denmark. However, Euroscepticism at the party level existed long before the Danish People's party entered into parliament. Ever since Danish citizens voted for accession to the European Community in 1972, there have been political parties in parliament and political movements outside of parliament with negative and sceptical orientations towards European integration.⁵

While most parties that have been represented in parliament during the time period under study are (at least to some extent) critical towards European integration, today, four parties (the Conservative People's Party, the Liberals, the Social Democrats and the So-

⁴That is, when the questioner asks for a written answer. For oral answers, the number is restricted to two questions per question time. To receive an oral answer to a written question during question time on a Wednesday, it has to be submitted before noon the previous Friday. On Wednesday afternoon, parliament holds the question hour (*spørgetimen*), during which MPs have the opportunity to ask questions that are not known by the minister beforehand. Subsequently, during question time (*spørgetiden*), ministers answer the written questions that they have received the previous Friday.

⁵In fact, the Eurosceptic People's Movement against the EU and its less radical ally June Movement never participated in national elections, which is why the literature speaks of a dual Danish party system, one for national elections and one for EU referendums and EP elections.

cial Liberals) are considered as fully supporting the EU. However, two of those parties, the Social Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party, have had intensive and controversial internal debates about the EU and have adjusted the official party line over time (Knudsen, 2008). The most Eurosceptic competitors in the post-Maastricht era, besides the far-right Danish People's Party, are rather small. The far-leftist Unity List/Red-Green Alliance is not only in favor of a Danish withdrawal from the EU but also opposes the EU as such. The classical liberal New/Liberal Alliance appreciates the EU's free market but rejects most other regulations coming from the EU. Before the 1990's, communist parties such as the Left Socialists and the Socialist People's Party as well as the special interest competitor Justice Party of Denmark were the most critical towards European integration.

— Table 1 about here —

Table 1 presents an overview of all parties represented in parliament during the period under study and provides information about party family, duration of parliamentary representation as well as average vote and seat shares. In sum, the Danish party landscape presents an interesting case for a longitudinal study of EU scrutiny activities of political parties with mainstream and extreme Eurosceptic competitors representing different party families and ideological orientations.

Data and Methods

To test my expectations about selective issue emphasis and the expansion of policy issues, I need information that allows me to identify the policy issues that are addressed in parties' parliamentary questions about the EU. The Danish Policy Agendas Project, which is part of the Comparative Agendas Project, has collected several data sets that

capture the issue agendas of different political actors across several decades, including parliamentary questions tabled by political parties.⁶ Most importantly, the manually-coded CAP data set contains a dummy variable that states whether the unit of observation (the individual parliamentary question) is related to the EU. This variable is coded 1 if the EU (e.g. actors, institutions, legislation) is explicitly mentioned in the text of the parliamentary question. In total, 5,249 out of 95,910 questions tabled by opposition parties in the period between 1973 and 2013 are related to the EU. These questions build the basis of my analysis. In addition, two variables (main topic and subtopic levels) indicate the policy issue category assigned to the question. The main level differentiates between 21 broad categories, including policy areas such as macroeconomics, health or education. The main topic categories are divided into 236 subtopic categories that account for more specific policy issues. Examples of subtopic categories for the main topic 'macroeconomics' are 'tax policy and tax reform', 'price control' and 'monetary policy'.⁷ The detailed coding on the subtopic level also allows me to identify parliamentary questions that address general aspects of the EU. The subtopic 'EU', which is part of the main topic category 'foreign policy', is assigned if a parliamentary question is related to general questions of the EU including its institutions, treaties, referendums or enlargement. Moreover, the data cover information about the party that has asked the question as well as the date when the question was tabled. In sum, the Danish CAP dataset is well-suited to analyze the expansion of issues over time, especially, since the logic of the coding approach perfectly suits my differentiation between general and policy-specific issues related to the EU.

⁶The data in the Danish Policy Agenda Project have been collected by Christoffer Green-Pedersen and Peter Bjerre Mortensen with support from the Danish Social Science Research Council and the Research Foundation at Aarhus University. For further details, see <http://www.agendasetting.dk>.

⁷For a complete list of all issue categories, please consult <http://www.agendasetting.dk/files/uploaded/61201510833PM1.pdf>

Issue expansion

The second hypothesis regarding the expansion of policy issues in opposition parties' parliamentary questions over time is tested in two different ways. First, I created a variable that indicates how many different subtopic categories have been addressed in parliamentary questions about the EU from all opposition parties during the year. Thus, the unit of analysis is the annual (1973-2013) number of subtopics related to the EU. This leads to a total of 41 units of observation. The count response is then used as the dependent variable in the following analysis of issue expansion over time. Theoretically, the variable runs from 0 (no EU-related questions have been tabled) to 236 (EU-related questions with regard to all possible subtopic categories have been tabled). However, empirically, the variable never reaches its minimum and maximum value. Because of the dispersion of the variable, I estimate negative binomial regression models. Other than Poisson models with a single parameter μ (the mean), the negative binomial regression adds a dispersion parameter α that allows for a wide variety of shapes.⁸ The following independent variables are included in the models. I test for time dependence using a linear predictor (years) and restricted cubic time splines that estimate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables as a piecewise function. The function is linear before the first and after the last knot and cubic polynomial in between. Because of the small sample size, I decided to include three knots instead of the five determined by Harrel's default percentiles (Harrel, 2015). Moreover, I include a dummy variable that takes into account the reform of questioning regulations in the Danish parliament in 2007. I also add the share of EU-related questions tabled in parliament. I expect a positive relationship between the relative number of questions about the EU and the number of issues addressed in these questions. Furthermore, addressing

a wide range of policy issues in parliamentary questions about the EU might be a function of the number of interests represented in parliament. If more parties are holding seats in parliament, we might see more diversity with regard to the policy issues addressed. I therefore control for the number of parties represented in parliament.

In addition to count response models, I test the issue expansion hypothesis by calculating diversity scores. In contrast to the simple count of policy issues, diversity scores also consider the distribution across policy issues. I use Shannon's H, a well-established diversity index that has recently been used to investigate issue attention of political actors (John and Jennings, 2010; Bischof, 2015). It is a probabilistic measure of the relative concentration of observations across a defined number of categories. In this study, it considers the probability of parliamentary questions to fall within a specific subtopic category. A higher score implies a higher level of uncertainty in determining the category in which a parliamentary question is about to fall. Shannon's H can be expressed as follows:

$$H' = (-1) \sum_{i=1}^{236} p(x_i) \ln(p(x_i)) \quad (1)$$

Scores (H') are estimated as the negative sum for all subtopic categories of the likelihood, p , that an object (x) falls within a particular subtopic category i , multiplied by the natural log of that likelihood.⁹ I follow Greene (2015) and transform Shannon's H into the effective number of issues (ENI) by exponentiating the diversity score. Hence, larger values of ENI represent more issue expansion.

Selective issue emphasis

The second dependent variable refers to the *selective issue emphasis hypothesis*, which states that Eurosceptic opposition parties are more likely to address general as-

⁸The decision to report negative binomial regression models instead of Poisson models is based on AIC/BIC tests.

⁹Logarithms of zero cannot be calculated. For all issues that have received no attention in a given year, the value is 0.

pects of the EU than mainstream opposition parties. I use a fractional response variable that captures the annual proportion of EU-related questions assigned to the subtopic category ‘EU’ for each opposition party represented in parliament. This results in an unbalanced panel with 241 units of analysis. Fractional data raise several methodological issues. Most importantly, one must take the bounded nature of the data ($0 \leq y \leq 1$) into account. Linear models would generate predictors outside the unit interval and are therefore not suitable. Moreover, fractions of 0 and 1 are not only theoretical values but actually appear in my data. I decided to make use of the flexibility of generalized linear models. In particular, I follow Papke and Wooldridge (1996) and apply fractional logit models. The fraction y can be expressed as a function of covariates x :

$$g(E(y)) = \mathbf{x}\beta, y \sim F, \quad (2)$$

where $g(\cdot)$ represents the link function and F is the distributional family. For the fractional logit model, this becomes

$$E[\log(y/(1 - y))] = \mathbf{x}\beta, y \sim \text{Bernoulli}. \quad (3)$$

My data has an unbalanced panel structure in which observations for the same units (parties) are observed over multiple points in time (years). This means that I have to account for correlation of error terms for parties over time. I decided to estimate population-averaged estimators with cluster-robust standard errors, which simply regresses my dependent variable on an intercept and my independent variables. Time-specific effects are assumed to already be captured in the regressors. Alternatively, one could estimate fixed or random effects models to deal with the correlation of error terms. However, fixed effects models limit the explanatory power of regressors with little within-variation. Thus, many of my regressors would be imprecisely estimated. Random effects models seem to be inappropriate as well. My models represent important indicators for across-party variation (e.g. measurements based on party ideology), which makes it likely that unob-

served individual-effects are correlated with the regressors.

As I assume Eurosceptic opposition parties to be more likely to address general aspects of the EU, my key independent variable captures party-based Euroscepticism. I draw on data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), which is widely used to identify party positions towards European integration (Williams and Spoon, 2015). More specifically, I use the difference between positive and negative quasi-sentences about European integration, both measured as a proportion of the total quasi-sentences in the manifesto. To ease interpretation, the variable is rescaled so that the values for party-based Euroscepticism are allowed to fall within 0 and 10 (5 marks a neutral position towards the EU). Empirically, the range goes from 3.7 to 5.7 with values above five representing negative positions towards the EU. Furthermore, I account for party extremism using the distance to the vote share-weighted mean of the left-right score from the CMP. The variable is rescaled as well and ranges from 5.01 to 9.05 with higher values representing more extreme party positions (5 marks the mean for all parties weighted by the share of votes).

I control for party size using the absolute number of seats in parliament. Moreover, I take opposition parties’ distance to the government into account. As mentioned before, Denmark usually has minority governments that rely on the support of opposition parties from the same ideological bloc. A dummy variable is included that indicates whether an opposition party belongs to the same bloc as the parties in government. This allows me to control whether specifics of the Danish party system impact on questioning behavior in EU affairs. In addition, I include a variable that accounts for the degree of the EU’s legislative authority. The variable is an additive function of the scope, delegation and pooling of EU competences (see Rauh, 2015; Biesenbender, 2011). It includes the number of policy areas covered by EU primary law, the share of EU decision-making powers with a Commission right of initiative and the share of EU

decisions subject to simple or qualified majorities in the Council. I expect to find a negative relationship as higher levels of EU legislative authority should lead parties to focus less on general aspects of the EU. Similar to the test of the issue expansion hypothesis, I include the reform dummy. In addition, I control for potential changes in the behavior of Eurosceptic parties after the reform by including an interaction term. Eurosceptic parties might focus even more on general aspects when they ask for ministers' opinions than when they ask factual questions. Finally, a dummy variable indicates whether a referendum about the EU has taken place in the given year. Referendums should increase the fraction of general aspects of the EU in parties' parliamentary questions. An overview of all relevant variables can be found in the online appendix.

Results

I begin my discussion with the issue expansion hypothesis and present results for the development of policy issues addressed in opposition parties questions about the EU. The top left-hand panel in Figure 1 shows the number of subtopic issue categories addressed per year and suggests that there has been an increase over time. While the number of policy issues has been relatively stable from Denmark's accession to the European Community in 1973 until the 1990's (around 10 to 20 issues per year), we see a steep rise thereafter. Especially after the ratification of the treaty of Maastricht (more than 60 different issue categories) and around the discussion of the treaty establishing a constitution for Europe, many different subtopic categories have been addressed. However, every increase in the number of policy issues is followed by a downturn. This is particularly visible during the years after the policy issue count has reached its maximum in 2006, but also the increases in the late-1970's, mid-1980's and mid-1990's are accompanied by decreases in the number of policy issues soon after. To account for dif-

ferences in emphasis across policy issues, the top right-hand panel in Figure 1 plots the mean effective number of issues in parties' parliamentary questions about the EU based on Shannon's H.

— Figure 1 about here —

Again, the results suggest that the content of EU-related parliamentary questions has become more diverse over time. While parties on average asked questions on less than five different policy issues before the ratification of the Single European Act, the effective number of issues has clearly increased thereafter. The level of diversity reaches its maximum in 2005 with an average of 17 different policy issues per party. Subsequently, the number goes down again, which might be related to the reform of questioning regulations in the Danish parliament. The whiskers in the top right-hand panel of Figure 1 represent the standard deviation of the effective number of issues and suggest that not only the mean effective number of issues has increased over time but also variation across opposition parties. The online appendix provides more detailed information about the differences between parties. It shows that before the 1990's, mainly the Socialist People's Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Progress Party were interested in asking questions on a broad set of policy issues. Subsequently, the two new Eurosceptical competitors the Danish People's Party and the Unity List were particularly active in addressing different aspects of the EU. After the reform in 2007, the effective number of issues tends to go down again, especially for the two Eurosceptical competitors.

— Table 2 about here —

Table 2 takes up the descriptive information in the top left-hand panel of Figure 1 and reports results from my regression models. All three are negative binomial models with the count of subtopic policy issue categories addressed in EU-related parliamentary questions per year as the dependent variable. I report exponentiated coefficients to have a

change in the predictor value reflect a change in the number of policy issues addressed. The variable *time1* represents the time period or years considered in this study. Model 1 shows that with each increase in year, opposition parties address 8.7 per cent more policy issues. This linear effect of time is statistically significant in all three model specifications, however, smaller in model 3. The natural time spline *time2* is significant in model 1. The marginal effect (not shown here) is positive until the year 1995 and turns negative after the turn of the millennium. However, adding control variables makes the coefficient become insignificant. The reform in 2007 has a negative but non-significant effect. While the relative number of EU-related questions asked per year has a significant positive effect on the dependent variable with a 9.1 per cent increase for each one-unit change, the number of parties represented in parliament does not significantly contribute to the explanation of variation in the number of subtopic categories addressed. In sum, the results support my expectation that the number of policy issues have been expanded over time and endorse further analysis about selective issue emphasis and the differences between political parties.

I now turn to the results for the selective issue emphasis hypothesis. First, the bottom panel in Figure 1 pictures the overall share of general aspects of the EU in parliamentary questions over time. In addition, it also includes the share for pro-EU and anti-EU parties.¹⁰ The figure suggests that Eurosceptical parties constantly have higher shares of general questions about the EU than pro-European mainstream competitors. Even after the treaty of Maastricht, which lead to a clear increase in the policy issues addressed in EU-related questions, around 25 per cent of Eurosceptical parties' questions deal with EU polity-related aspects. While the divide between Eurosceptics and Europhiles was more dramatic during the 1970's and early 1980's, they seem to have become more similar over time. In sum, the figure suggests that

the overall fraction of general EU aspects decreases slightly over time.

— Figure 2 about here —

Figure 2 reports coefficients from the fractional logit regression based on Model 3 in Table A2 in the online appendix, which includes all relevant regressors. It shows that party-based Euroscepticism has a significantly positive effect on the proportion of general aspects addressed in opposition parties' parliamentary questions about the EU. Thus, I find support that parties with more negative attitudes towards the EU are more likely to emphasize general EU matters than mainstream opposition parties. The coefficient for party extremism is positive but not statistically significant in any of the models. The direction of the coefficient, however, points in the expected direction, suggesting that parties further away from the mean ideological party position tend to ask more questions about general EU aspects than moderate competitors. Party size, being a member of the government bloc, the reform in 2007 as well as its interaction term with Euroscepticism and the referendum variable also have no significant effects. The positive coefficient of the bloc party variable suggests that opposition parties ask more questions on general aspects of the EU if they belong to the same bloc. This is a sign that parties are distinguishable by their position towards European integration even if they have a similar ideological outlook. The reform in 2007 does not show any significant changes in parties' questioning behavior with respect to general EU aspects. Thus, even though the reform has reduced the number of questions asked, this has no effect on the share of general questions about the EU. This can also be seen in the fraction of general EU-questions for individual parties reported in the online appendix, which shows no clear trend after the reform in 2007. While the fraction of general aspects for the Danish People's Party and the Unity List tends to move slightly upwards, the non-significant interaction term between the reform and Euroscepti-

¹⁰Pro-EU parties are defined as having a value of 5 or below on the rescaled party-Euroscepticism variable. Anti-EU parties are parties with a value above 5.

cism in the online appendix does not support the conclusion that the reform has biased the questioning behavior of Eurosceptic parties towards more general EU matters. This leads me to conclude that the reform has reduced the effective number of issues for some parties but no effect on the emphasis of general aspects of the EU. The result for the EU authority variable shows a significant negative effect, which implies that the fraction of parties' general EU questions decreases if the EU's legislative authority rises.

— Figure 3 about here —

To more fully understand how party Euroscepticism acts on selective issue emphasis in parties' EU-related questions, Figure 3 plots the marginal effect of Euroscepticism on the fraction of general EU aspects. The value of 5 on the Euroscepticism scale (x-axis) can be interpreted as a neutral position towards the EU. It clearly shows that parties that are more sceptical towards the EU have a higher probability to focus on general aspects of the EU than Europhile mainstream parties.

Conclusion

The question of whether and how political parties scrutinize their government in EU affairs features prominently in the literature about parliamentary control in the EU. Especially opposition parties are considered as key actors able to contribute to the realization of democratic accountability in EU affairs. While many studies ask how active opposition parties actually are in controlling their government in EU affairs, we still know relatively little about the policy issues they address. In this study, I therefore analyze the content of opposition parties' EU-related parliamentary questions. In particular, I investigate differences between mainstream and Eurosceptic competitors with regard to the emphasis of general and policy-specific aspects of the EU. Moreover, I argue that parties have been responsive to the increase in the EU's legislative authority and expect that parliamentary

questions about the EU have become more diverse over time. To test my theoretical expectations, I rely on a unique collection of written parliamentary questions tabled in the Danish *Folketing*. Results based on count and fractional logit regression models as well as diversity measures show that parties have indeed broadened the range of issues addressed in EU-related questions. Especially after the ratification of the treaty of Maastricht, parties have been increasingly responsive to the transfers of legislative authority from the domestic to the European level. While most opposition parties reach adequate levels of EU issue diversity, parties with Eurosceptic outlooks are indeed more likely to emphasize general aspects of the European Union in their parliamentary questions.

I believe that the results contribute to our understanding of democratic accountability in the EU. The upward trend in the level of issue diversity signals that opposition parties acknowledge the increased authority of the EU in the policy-making process. The result allows for a positive assessment of the functioning of democratic accountability in EU politics. The more policy issues that parties address in their parliamentary questions, the more information they will receive about decision-making in EU affairs, and the more pressure they will be able to put on the executive. In sum, the development of issue expansion in parliamentary questions suggests that domestic parliamentary actors wish to play an active role in EU decision-making. However, the fact that Eurosceptic parties are strongly emphasizing on general aspects of the EU darkens the overall picture. The finding implies that the most active parties make strategic use of the scrutiny instruments at hand. Emphasizing issues *about* the EU supports extreme competitors in advertising their Eurosceptic outlook and helps them become more visible in public debates about the future of the EU. However, this behavior does not actively contribute to holding the government's policy-decisions in EU affairs to account.

The wider implication of my finding is that political parties hold the reins in parliamen-

tary control in EU affairs. Formal rules provide domestic parliamentary actors with opportunities. However, the extent to which these opportunities are actively used as well as the purpose of EU scrutiny depend on the incentive structures of political parties. This should be taken into account in the discussion about the future role of national parliaments in the policy-making process of the EU. Finally, what do we learn from the Danish case? I have argued that Denmark is a suitable case for testing a framework of partisan questioning dynamics. This is certainly true. The Danish party landscape is informative because of the wide range of parties represented in the period under study. However, two specificities about the Danish case are important to keep in mind. The frequency of minority governments distinguishes Denmark from most other EU member states. The results show that opposition parties' support to the government does not influence their EU-related questioning behavior. However, one cannot rule out that the feature of Danish minority parliamentarism does not matter at all. Second, the Danish opt-outs from certain portions of the body of European Community Law might scale down the range of issues that parties address in their questions. I therefore suggest that future research investigates issue expansion and selective issue emphasis with respect to the EU from a comparative perspective.

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Figure 1: Top left-hand panel: Number of policy issues per year (EU issues count); Top right-hand panel: Effective number of policy issues; Bottom panel: Fraction of general EU-questions (smoothed lowess curves) (CI 95%).

Figure 2: Coefficient plot based on model 3 in table A2

Table 1 : Party family and average vote/seat shares of parties represented in the Danish *Folketing*, 1973-2013

Party name	Party family	Represented in parliament	Vote share (%) (avg.)	Seats (avg.)
Centre Democrats	Social Democracy	1973-2001	4.6%	8
Christian Democrats/People's Party	Christian democracy	1973-94; 1998-2005	2.5%	4
Conservative People's Party	Conservative	✓	12.6%	23
Common Course	Communist/Socialist	1987-88	2.0%	1
Communist Party of Denmark	Communist/Socialist	1973-79	2.9%	4
Danish People's Party	Right-wing	1995-2013	11.8%	21
Danish Social-Liberal Party	Liberal	✓	6.0%	11
Justice Party of Denmark	Special Issue	1973-75; 1977-81	2.3%	3
Left Socialists	Communist/Socialist	1975-87	2.4%	4
New/Liberal Alliance	Liberal	2007-2013	3.9%	7
Liberal Party of Denmark	Liberal	✓	18.8%	34
Progress Party	Liberal	1973-2001	8.1%	14
Social Democrats	Social Democracy	✓	31.2%	59
Socialist People's Party	Communist/Socialist	✓	8.6%	16
Unity List/Red-Green Alliance	Communist/Socialist	1994-2013	3.2%	5

Source: ParlGov database; ✓ = entire period (1973-2013)

Table 2: Results - Negative binomial models

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	EU issues (count)	EU issues (count)	EU issues (count)
time1	1.087*** (0.00858)	1.084*** (0.00870)	1.067*** (0.00820)
time2	0.945*** (0.00924)	0.969 (0.0174)	0.980 (0.0158)
reform 07'		0.672 (0.141)	0.714 (0.142)
EU questions (%)			1.091*** (0.0226)
no. of parties			1.006 (0.0360)
lnalpha	-2.669	-3.474	-4.129
ll	-147.5	-145.8	-138.5
chi2	144.1	161.0	306.9
N	41	41	41

Exponentiated coefficients; Robust standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 3: Marginal effect of euroscepticism (CI 95%)

Appendix

A 1: List of variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
EU issues (count) DV_1	41	39.3	25.8	6	98
EU general (fraction) DV_2	224	.27	.14	0	1
EU questions (%)	41	4.8	2.1	1.3	9.4
no. of parties	41	6.8	1.5	5	10
euroscepticism	224	5.1	.2	3.7	5.7
extremism	224	6.2	.9	5.0	9.1
seats	224	18.1	15.5	0	69
EU authority	224	142.8	12.8	128.2	159.5

A 2: Results - Population-averaged fractional logit models

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	EU general	EU general	EU general	EU general
euroscepticism	1.516*** (0.435)	1.322** (0.432)	1.646*** (0.356)	1.713*** (0.388)
extremism		0.0184 (0.106)	0.0457 (0.123)	0.0481 (0.123)
seats		-0.00921 (0.011)	-0.00600 (0.009)	-0.00510 (0.009)
bloc party		0.217 (0.308)	0.224 (0.323)	0.256 (0.318)
reform 07'			0.0915 (0.213)	3.340 (3.821)
referendum			0.208 (0.306)	0.209 (0.307)
EU authority			-0.0285** (0.010)	-0.0290** (0.009)
reform 07' $\times$ euroscepticism				-0.634 (0.732)
Constant	-9.122*** (2.252)	-8.272*** (2.169)	-6.153** (2.138)	-6.497** (2.406)
chi2	12.12	30.59	44.80	64.74
N	224	224	224	224

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

A 4: Effective number of issues (by party)

A 5: Fraction of general EU-questions (right-hand y-axis) & total number of EU-related questions (left-hand y-axis) (smoothed lowess curves; by party)